

Kaizen

The Kaizen Partnership Ltd

“I believe the concepts enshrined in your work are essential to be able to produce consistent and significant personal and organisational change”

Oliver Mack, Director, Common Purpose

We are passionate about our work, and we stand by our results



The Kaizen Partnership Ltd is an innovative, outcome-focused training and consultancy company producing outstanding results in the areas of Regeneration, Housing, Education and Employment. Our understanding and experience across the field brings depth to our work in each individual sector. We value the diversity in our work, not only because our interests are cross-cutting, but because we believe that the issues are actually interlinked.

We are unashamedly different, developing practical approaches to complex problems; specialising in constructing effective relationships and building community into partnership. We believe that effective leadership at all levels is critical to the quality of partnership, and that sustainable communities are built on cohesive communities.

Sustainable communities are made up of people, not bricks and mortar or services. Too often work with the people is left as a bolt on, under resourced and undervalued. **We believe that the people will either provide the foundation that allows the community to be sustainable, or they will be the obstacle that will keep the vision of sustainable communities a dream rather than a reality.**

Our clients range from Local Authorities to schools, small charities to the London 2012 Olympic Delivery Authority.

We specialise in designing and delivering cutting edge projects in the community sector; our work focuses on making a difference through empowering individuals and communities. We offer creative, highly practical and successful interventions via our unique workshops, training programmes and multi-component projects. Our work is based on sound and practical theory and application, and we utilise best practices to ensure success.

In all of our programmes we emphasise how to build and sustain effective relationships and partnerships - the human aspect of how to develop effective partnership working in complex environments. We focus on the relational aspect of place making, believing that it is not solely the individual parts that matter, but the way those parts interact and relate to each other. We also address how our values and the way we habitually see things can limit the creativity we bring to partnership working.

The following summarises and outlines our theoretical assumptions and practical approach to building sustainable communities.

Common Unity

“What stops people from effecting change and what techniques are needed to foster people’s potential? I learnt that we can redefine ‘community’ as ‘common unity’ in a society so diverse it appears too difficult to overcome our differences and see ourselves as one nation.”

Camden resident participating in our Estates Pride Programme

At the heart of successful place-making programmes is a common unity where community and professionals work in harmony to create a place of opportunity and aspiration. Common unity is built on a foundation of agreement about what sort of place people want to create and live in. It emerges from creative and effective partnerships among professionals, across diverse agencies, and with the residents who live in the places we are seeking to transform. Common unity describes a dynamic process in which residents and professionals at regional and sub-regional levels come together to overcome problems and work together to create and sustain vibrant and thriving places.

“Everyone has a story to tell, emotions to express and wisdom to impart, and a good practitioner can find and interpret them and turn them into a unifying narrative.”

Planning and Engaging with Intercultural Communities, Comedia

To create and find that unifying narrative requires a process of building long-term partnerships that involve complex interpersonal and organisational relations. The human aspects of this process, building mutual understanding, reaching consensus, learning about power sharing, how to effectively deal with conflict etc. take time to learn. In our work with agencies across the UK, we have discovered two key aspects of communication that strongly impact upon partnership working and building community cohesion.

CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Relationship to Change in Complex Environments

In a rapidly changing world, there is an inherent challenge for any organisation or community, to maintain equilibrium and purpose whilst responding to internal and external changes. This is because organisations and communities are not closed systems, they rely upon and are influenced by the external environment in which they exist and by internal systems such as the people and teams that make up the community or organisation.

"The defining characteristic of a system is that it cannot be understood as a function of its isolated components. The behaviour of the system doesn't depend on what each part is doing but on how each part is interacting with the rest."
Kofman and Senge, 1993

The ability to be appropriately flexible in environments characterised by perpetual transformation (economic forces, government policies, the make up of communities and human needs etc) requires our relational skills to remain open and adaptive in the face of change.

When we fail to grasp the systemic or interactive nature of communities, we will tend to address symptoms rather than underlying causes; we will try to solve problems of community cohesion by attempting to fix a part of the system, and naturally there will be diverse ideas about what part of the system needs fixing. The more discussion and feedback there is about the whole system: the community, organisations within the community, teams within organisations, and how the parts of the system are interacting or co-operating, the more likely we are to be continually responsive and adaptive. The more committed we are to the processes of interaction and cooperation, the more able we are to build and sustain vital and creative communities.

This level of co-operation involves being open to other views and ideas, getting to the heart of what it is we each mean by thriving community, and continuing to keep alive that concept in a constantly changing world. This means that a certain amount of conflict is inevitable. In the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) research findings on 'Planning and Engaging with Intercultural Communities', they identify conflict as an effect of change, and state that, **"planning and development which avoid conflict may cause more harm than conflict itself."**

We believe that it is possible to redefine conflict as a process in which diverse ideas and opinions can flow and become part of new solutions.

Faulty Reasoning

Human beings are neither logical nor consistent in the way they make decisions. We are plagued by faulty reasoning on many levels, and very often make choices that are not in our long-term (or even short-term) interests. The usual paradigm of thinking is the belief that information alters actions and behaviours. In Kaizen, however, we believe that information alone does not necessarily alter actions. A clear example is smoking, where there is no shortage of information of the health risks yet many people fail to make the logical decision to stop smoking.

It is necessary that we understand and mitigate the emotional and cultural factors that impede our ability to respond to change and conflict. **This involves a shift from seeing problems as caused by someone or something 'out there' to seeing how our own actions and views play a part in the problems we experience.** We could say that we co-create the community, the organisation, or the team that we find ourselves in. This in turn means we have the capacity to change the community, organisation or team we are in simply by acknowledging and taking on new perspectives or courses of actions.

In order to do this we must recognise the flaws and errors of judgement from which we habitually suffer, for example, that fact that we use cognitive heuristics or 'rules of thumb' to reduce the complexity of making judgments. Substantial bodies of research, over many years and in many disciplines, show that in life generally, and in organisational settings, people rarely seek out all the information they need to make effective decisions. We instead rely upon short-cuts: information we can easily recall, that we agree with, and that is familiar. So, when we communicate with people, especially new people or people who fall outside the norm of what we are used to, we can all too often rely on these rules of thumb or stereotypes to make our decisions. Similarly, when we seek to envision a place that we want to live, limiting ideas of what is possible can hold us back.

A related theory that also highlights our inability to look freshly at things is the idea of 'mental models'. Described as internal ideas that regulate our actions, they influence how we feel and act much more than what is actually happening in the moment. A simple example is the mental model that groups of young people hanging out on a street corner pose a threat. Someone who holds this mental model will have a reflex response of avoidance and fear upon encountering a group of young people regardless of what the young people are actually doing. At a simple level it translates to the fact that **we tend to pay more attention to what we think is being said or done than to what is actually being said or done.** Our mental models are varied, but the research highlights a common underlying motivation, the desire to avoid perceived threat.

We practice this 'defensive reasoning' in order to ensure the following:

- **To remain in unilateral control;**
- **To maximise winning and minimise losing;**
- **To suppress negative feelings;**
- **To be as rational as possible.** (Argyris, 1991)

Stereotypical thinking and mental models, added to other factors and attitudes, act to limit our ability to create effective partnerships and build sustainable communities.

In order to work effectively in open systems that are perpetually changing, we need to have a level of skill in communication that allows us to see the flaws in our mental models and reasoning. We must also learn the skill of open communication that allows for divergence and even conflict. Most importantly, we must recognise that in an open system, we will never reach an end state of community cohesion. It is an ongoing process that relies upon developing and strengthening relationships and connections, and building the skills to achieve that.

The following presents a relational model for building these skills, and is based on best practices from the research on sustainable communities.

A THREEFOLD RELATIONAL MODEL FOR CREATING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Effective communication and partnership working needs the following to realise its potential:

- **Building and sustaining shared vision** that fosters commitment to long-term engagement;
- **Developing communication skills** which focus on the openness needed to unearth our present ways of seeing the world; and
- **Collaborative working that promotes the skills** to look for the larger picture that lies beyond individual perspectives.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING SHARED VISION

Building shared vision in changing environments is not a static or finite process. It requires time and commitment, and forms around longer-term strategic plans for community cohesion. The vision must encompass a long-term perspective of involving the community and partners in place making efforts rather than just short-term targets.

Research shows that the best approaches integrate short-term participation activities with changes in local decision-making structures that engage local residents and partners.

Short-Term Participation Activities

- Engagement, whether of the community or partners, should ideally be built over a long time and must include meaningful opportunities for continual involvement and feedback.
- Creating a common understanding and vision of what a sustainable community looks like requires a thorough and far-reaching engagement process that goes beyond the usual suspects to ensure a representative group on the basis of ethnicity, age, gender etc.
- For community engagement to be successful, it must take into account the specific characteristics and nature of that community, and ideally be based on a thorough mapping of the area. In this way, social networks that already exist can be tapped into and strengthened, and gatekeepers in the community can be identified and their knowledge base be resourced.
- Engagement should also encourage discussion around issues that are of interest to a diversity of people. In conducting community workshops all over the country, we have found that if you engage people through speaking and listening to their aspirations, you draw on a deeply held commitment they have to living in a safe and attractive place.
- Research shows that to sustain positive relationships, it is better to engage the community in meaningful activities around issues they feel motivated by rather than simply debating the issues.

“The skills acquired from the workshop are going to be necessary on the estate to allow it to participate positively in the next few months in what is a time of major change for the estate, from inside and out.”

Chair of Estate Management Board

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■ The attitude of those who are carrying out the engagement activities is also crucial. As the ASC's report on working with intercultural communities states, "Staff must be open, be good listeners, be honest and engender trust." This requires opportunities to identify and work with stereotypes, so staff are open to hearing and working with a diversity of opinions and ideas.

Changes in Local Decision-making / Democratic Structures

■ Balancing the need for efficiency with the time it takes to build consensus is perhaps the biggest challenge Local Authorities face in developing democratic and inclusive structures. It is important to make sure this does not lead to agencies reducing investment or paying lip service to community input.

■ Creasy, et al, found in their research that informal interaction is of value in building shared values: "they contrasted the relaxed feel of informal interactions with the more formal and time-restricted nature of local authority initiatives."

"It is the nature of our community development work that we need close contact and understanding of our colleagues. The relationships which are already strong have been strengthened through the 2 days."

Bromley by Bow Healthy Living Centre workshop participant

■ The fact that people feel able to influence decisions in their neighbourhood has a strong positive influence on community cohesion (Laurence and Heath, 2008). It is important to see participation as an end in itself, and not just as a means to an end. The purpose of interactions between people is often far less important than the quality of the interactions themselves (Creasy, et al).

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

At the heart of successful partnership working is the ability to communicate to a broad range of people. Partnerships will flounder or flourish, not solely as a result of the procedures put in place for democratic decision-making or partnership working, but on our collective abilities to communicate and generate common unity while juggling divergent interests and demands. This involves taking into account a wide variety of ideas, opinions and views.

"It's a good way for people in the community to get to know each other and value other people's views not just your own"

Resident on a Community Leadership Programme

"I have created good links which I will consider in my future work - this should prevent duplication"

Brent Regeneration professional

"Making people feel valued gives them the sense of spirit allowing them to take on the world"

Youth Worker participating in an Estate Community Leadership Programme

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY

RESIDENT FACTORS AND ATTITUDES

- Negative past experiences of tokenistic or non-existent consultation;
- Negative attitudes towards people in authority;
- A culture of blame-and-complain from a place of anger and perceived injustice;
- Lack of opportunities for residents and professionals to build positive relationships;
- Feelings of resignation, powerlessness and inertia;
- Language and cultural barriers;
- Lack of confidence.

PROFESSIONAL FACTORS AND ATTITUDES

- Silo-ism and turf mentality;
- Feelings of resignation, powerlessness and inertia;
- A culture of blame and complain;
- Ever increasing workloads and bureaucratic demands;
- Partnership fatigue;
- Resistant colleagues who do not buy into the change and empowerment agenda;
- A view that professionals know what is best for the community.

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“I found myself able to think above the problems, and then come back and look at them again in a more relaxed and objective way. I could then see what could be done in various situations. I gained a belief that it was possible to do things that had previously seemed impossible.”

Resident Participating in a 1-year Community Leader

■ Because mental models and rules of thumb can govern the way we make decisions, it is important to create environments in which individuals can debate and validate their assumptions. The more we can make conscious what our assumptions are, the more likely we are to correctly align our thoughts and assumptions with what is actually happening. Trained facilitators can play a key role in helping individuals surface their assumptions and test them against the collective experience of the community.

“This was a very different course to others I have attended. It challenged us to think out the answers for ourselves rather than just giving us the answers to certain questions”

Haringey Learning Mentor

■ It is important that learning communication skills becomes central to building cohesion. Providing time and space to engage in meaningful dialogue within and across communities allows for divergent views to be aired and consensus to emerge.

I learned to “look at myself and my motivations. To look at ways of solving problems rather than just complaining about them”

I learned “perceptions can cloud facts”

I learned “to tolerate and accept other people and their opinions”

Professional Participants on our Workshops

COLLABORATIVE WORKING

The need for effective partnership working and joined-up service provision has never been greater. Put simply, the problems we face in 21st Century Britain have causes that are so complex and intertwined that they demand an effective multi-agency response that works *with the community rather than for the community*.

Partnerships rely upon the broad involvement of key regional and local organisations. It is therefore vital that Local Authorities encourage joined-up working and maintain a culture that goes beyond organisational silos. Multi-disciplinary teams are now the norm in the public sector, with public and private partnerships working to achieve cross-cutting outcomes. Their levels of effectiveness and success is greatly affected by the underlying attitudes and values that partners bring to the table, as well as the quality of communication. All too often partnerships suffer because the values that underpin them do not support openness, creativity, or divergence.

“Good practice takes not the line of least resistance but the harder yet more creative road of conflict-management, mediation and relationship building.”

Planning and Engaging with Intercultural Communities, Comedia

“I learned that together people can come to a decision and achieve what they are committed to. It’s a positive way to show people that change is possible.”

Community Leadership Workshop Participant

■ Collaboration helps to build an understanding of context rather than content. In effect, it undermines our tendency to focus on the parts, and allows us to focus instead on the whole system that we operate in.

■ Collaboration involves a process of negotiation between the various parts or players who make up a community. By co-creating knowledge and having it validated we create what is called ‘actionable knowledge’. This is knowledge that is empirically based, and that to some extent replaces the mental models that impede community cohesion.

“There was a general feeling of ‘we’ve done all we can...some of our clients are beyond help’. There was little or no information sharing between projects to address the challenges both our staff and clients faced. Staff morale in some projects was low. As a result of the training, teams are working better together, staff morale has improved and we have exceeded our quarterly target for the first time.”

Illa Pattni, Manager, Brent in 2 Work

“Through their enthusiasm and innovative approach, Kaizen manage to engage even the least interested and most cynical of delegates. Their trainers are very skilled and every workshop delivered by them has met or exceeded the intended outcomes and results. I can without any reservation, highly recommend Kaizen as a training provider.”

Tina Short, Head of Diversity and Social Inclusion, Liverpool City Council

“The course really makes you think and provides not just one but many options and alternative ways of approaching things”

Raleigh International staff member

■ All too often, inter-agency partnerships lose direction or fall apart as a result of divergent ideas or unresolved conflicts, partnerships in name only. Yet conflict is an inevitable part of building consensus and cohesion and so all partnership building must include capacity building around how to manage conflict. Through open dialogue, people can examine judgements and preconceptions, and explore how to move beyond limiting ideas. Professionals and community members need support to be more open to others views and ideas, and must develop the skills to manage rather than avoid conflict.

“I found the workshop to be a breath of fresh air in its ability to throw off all the negativity that comes with Anti-Social Behaviour, Tenant Participation and community cohesion.”

Kim Thomson, TMO Liaison Officer

“Staff were able to share experiences and solutions through managed role-play and facilitated discussions; these elements of the workshop were incredibly successful. Managers in all centres witnessed positive behaviour change amongst staff.”

James Wright, Manager TNG

THE KAIZEN MODEL FOR A SUSTAINABLE EMPOWERED COMMUNITY

The concepts introduced here are not new. They simply restate a critical element of sustaining communities and building common unity – strong and effective partnerships and relationships. In our training workshops and programmes, we address these factors (amongst others) and have been brought in specifically to support and foster a strategic change of culture, which in turn leads to changes in behaviour. The Kaizen model of leadership is not about hierarchy, power or control. Leadership, for us, has to do with ownership. If you approach situations from the position

that you have an ability to respond, you can then make things happen wherever you are in the hierarchy, or whether or not it is in your job description.

Foundation for the Future

No single programme however large can guarantee lasting improvements in communication. We see our programmes as similar to planting a seed, taking care of it so it germinates, and then nurturing it so that it has a chance to grow and develop the resilience it needs for long-term survival. In everything we do, we introduce the core communication skills outlined here, and these are reinforced throughout.

We can set processes in motion, engage and unite the wider community, increase skill levels, impact on behaviour patterns and the attitudes beneath them, and foster resourcefulness of all participants. This lays the foundation for lasting, sustainable communities.

Honest Broker / Straight Talker

We have identified and filled a critical role in community building, *The Honest Broker / Straight Talker*. Coming in from the outside we are able to operate as a neutral player, untainted by the inevitable past experiences and prejudices that all parties have about each other. We cut through the prevailing culture of blame and complain, and build relationships based on respect and trust with all parties.

We talk straight and are not afraid to confront difficult issues (or individuals) and are able to say things to both residents and professionals that they could not say to each other. In this way, we model and promote a culture of openness and embracing change and divergence.

The word Kaizen means ‘continual improvement’ and this is at the heart of our approach. Whatever work we are involved in we make sure we have clear intended outcomes, that we do what we say, and that we are always looking for ways to improve on what we do.

We have never had a dissatisfied client or delivered a programme that did not more than meet the intended targets.

“It is time for both national and local government to sit up and recognise the values of such training groups. This is the way to empower communities.”

Sylvia Dacres, Community Leadership - Workshop Participant

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Programme Elements

All our projects are bespoke designs, and our community programmes include combinations of the following elements.

- Community Audit, Research and Fact finding
- Engagement of Residents, Professionals (or both)
- Community Leadership Workshops
- Professional Effective Partnerships Workshops
- Engagement Training and Support for Residents and Professionals
- Ongoing Skills Workshops
- Coaching for Key Partners and Champions of Change
- Facilitating Meetings, Events or Projects
- Programme Evaluation

Want to find out more? ...Contact us

Our work is starting to be recognised and acknowledged on a wider stage. We have recently been asked to work with the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) to bring our expertise on community engagement and empowerment to the London 2012 Games.

- If you are interested in finding out more about the possibilities of working with Kaizen, contact us and we will be happy to give you a free hour of consultancy on an issue you want support with.

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“To get 40 or 50 people to turn up on a weekend to discuss their estate is near impossible and they managed it every time. So the methodology, although different, really works.”

Dave Francis, Community Engagement Officer, LB Camden



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